

CLAIMS

1. A method for transferring at least one of a media file and associated usage
5 rights data from a first user unit (110) to a second user unit (120), wherein the
media file is identifiable by a central interface unit (130) and includes at least one
component of image data, audio data, and video data, the method comprising the
steps of:

transferring at least one of the media file and the associated usage rights data
10 directly from the first user unit (110) to the second user unit (120) via a communica-
tion link between the first and second user units (110, 120);

limiting access by the first user unit (110) to the media file;

providing access to the second user unit (120) to the media file;

coupling at least one of the first and second user units (110, 120) over a
15 communications network to the central interface unit (130); and

logging, at the central interface unit (130), the transfer of at least one of the
media file and its associated usage rights data to the second user unit (130).

2. The method of claim 1, further comprising the step of retrieving, by the
20 second unit (120), either the media file or the associated usage rights data, not
transferred from the first user unit (110) to the second user unit (120), from the
central interface unit (130).

3. The method of any of the preceding claims, wherein the second user unit
25 (120) has a second media file with associated usage rights data, the method further
comprising the steps of:

transferring at least one of the second media file and its associated usage
rights data from the second user unit (120) to the first user unit (110);

limiting access by the second user unit (120) to the second media file;

30 providing access to the first user unit (110) to the second media file;

wherein the logging step further comprises the step of logging the transfer of
at least one of the second media file and its associated usage rights data from the
second user unit (120) to the first user unit (110).

4. The method of claim 3, wherein the transfer of at least one of the first media
35 file and its associated usage rights data to the second user unit (120) is part of a

swap transaction conditioned upon the transfer of at least one of the second media file and its associated usage rights data to the first user unit (110); and/or

wherein the second user unit (120) transfers more than one media file to the first unit (110) as part of a swap transaction.

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5. The method of claim 4, further comprising the step of generating a dummy media file substituting at least one of the second media file and its associated usage rights data to satisfy the swap transaction conditions.

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6. The method of any of the preceding claims, wherein each user unit (110, 120) has a storage unit (114, 124), an input buffer (116, 126), and an output buffer (118, 128), the method further comprising the steps of:

transferring the media file to be transferred from the storage unit (114, 124) of the transferring user unit (110, 120) to the associated output buffer (118, 128);
and

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transferring the media file to be transferred from the output buffer (118, 128) of the transferring user unit (110, 120) to the input buffer (126, 116) of the receiving user unit (120, 110).

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7. The method of any of the preceding claims, wherein the logging step additionally comprises at least one of:

updating a transfer log associated with the transferring user unit (110, 120) to reflect the removal of the media file; and

updating a transfer log associated with the receiving user unit (110, 120) to reflect the addition of the transferred media file.

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8. The method of any of the preceding claims, further comprising the steps of:
polling a digital rights management system (130) within the central interface unit by at least one of the transferring and receiving user units (110, 120);

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receiving a command or message from the digital rights management system (130) by the transferring user unit (110, 120) to limit access by the transferring user unit (110, 120) to the transferred media file; and

receiving a command or message from the digital rights management system (130) by the receiving user unit (110, 120) to grant to the receiving user unit (110, 120) access to the received media file.

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9. The method of claim 8, further comprising the step of preventing access to a transferred media file by a receiving user (110, 120) if the digital rights management system (130) has associated the transferred media file with a third user unit.

5 10. The method of any of the preceding claims, further comprising the step of cryptographically associating each transferred digital media file with the receiving user unit (110, 120).

10 11. The method of any of the preceding claims, further comprising the step of transferring the transferred media file from the receiving user unit (110, 120) back to the transferring unit (110, 120) if the transfer is not ratified.

12. The method of any of the preceding claims, further comprising the steps of:
providing a history log for integration into each media file that identifies at
15 least one of previous owners and transfers of the media file; and
synchronizing the media file history log with the logged transfers stored within
the central interface unit (130).

13. The method of any of the preceding claims, further comprising the step of
20 determining whether the media file is transferred with one or more usage restrictions.

14. The method of any of the preceding claims, further comprising the step of
transferring the transferred media file from the receiving user unit (110, 120) back to
25 the transferring user unit (110, 120) after a predetermined usage restriction condition associated with the transferred media file has been met.

15. The method of any of the preceding claims, further comprising the step of
transferring the transferred media file from the receiving user unit (110, 120) back to
30 the transferring user unit (110, 120) after a predetermined amount of time has expired, or after the receiving user unit (110, 120) has accessed the transferred media file greater than or equal to a predetermined number of occurrences, or if the transfer has not been ratified by the central interface unit (130), or if the transfer is subsequently cancelled, or if the transfer is not successful.

35 16. The method of any of the preceding claims, further comprising the step of periodically communicating, by the central interface unit (130), with individual user

units (110, 120), to synchronize at least one of the media files and the associated usage rights data, if any, stored within each user unit (110, 120), with one or more databases within the central interface unit (130).

5 17. A system (100) for transferring a media file that includes at least one component of image data, audio data, and video data, and associated usage rights data, comprising:

a first user unit (110) configured to store at least one digital media file ;

a second user unit (120) configured to store at least one digital media file ;

10 wherein said first and second user units (110, 120) are configured to initiate a communications link between the first and second users units (110, 120) to transfer at least one of a media file or associated usage rights data therebetween;

a central interface unit (130) configured to communicate with at least one of said first and second user units (110, 120) to log the transfer of digital media files;

15 a first data management unit (112) within said first user unit (110) for limiting access to media files transferred by said first user unit (110); and

a second data management unit (122) within said second user unit (120) for providing access to media files received by said second user unit (120).

20 18. A computer program product, comprising:

a computer usable medium having computer readable code embodied therein for transferring at least one of a media file or associated usage rights data from a first user unit (110) to a second user unit (120), wherein the media file is identifiable by a central interface unit (130) and includes at least one component of image data, audio data, and video data, the computer code product comprising:

25 computer readable program code portions for transferring at least one of the media file and the associated usage rights data from the first user unit (110) to the second user unit (120) over a communication link between the first and second user units (110, 120);

30 computer readable program code portions for limiting access by the first user unit (110) to the media file;

computer readable program code portions for providing access to the second user unit (120) to the media file;

35 computer readable program code portions for coupling at least one of the first and second user units (110, 120) over a communications network to the central interface unit (130); and

computer readable program code portions for logging, at the central interface unit(130), the transfer of the media file to the second user unit (120).

19. The computer program product of claim 18, stored on a computer readable recording medium.

20. A system (100) comprising a computer processor and a memory coupled to the processor, where the memory is encoded with one or more programs that is configured to perform a method for transferring at least one of a media file and associated usage rights data from a first user unit (110) to a second user unit (120), wherein the media file is identifiable by a central interface unit (130) and includes at least one component of image data, audio data, and video data, the method comprising the steps of:

transferring at least one of the media file and the associated usage rights data directly from the first user unit (110) to the second user unit (120) over a direct communication link between the first and second user units (110, 120);

limiting access by the first user unit (110) to the media file;

providing access to the second user unit (120) to the media file;

coupling at least one of the first and second user units (110, 120) over a communications network to the central interface unit (130); and

logging, at the central interface unit (130), the transfer of at least one of the media file and its associated usage rights data to the second user unit (120).